

POND STOCKING

Properly stocking a pond can make a world of difference in the quality of fishing it offers for years to come. The stocking strategy you choose should be geared toward the kind of fishing you want. If your primary interest is raising fish for eating, channel catfish or hybrid striped bass are a good choice. Both grow large on a diet of artificial feed and provide good fishing, too. If you just want to have something in your pond to catch, you could get by with almost any stocking combination. Most people, though, would like a low maintenance pond that provides good sport fishing, as well as an occasional fish to eat. After years of studies in ponds across the country, state fisheries biologists recommend stocking a combination of largemouth bass, bluegill, and channel catfish as the best choice for warmwater ponds.



The best stocking combination for warmwater ponds is largemouth bass, bluegill, and channel catfish.

Most Nebraska ponds are only capable of supporting warmwater fish species year-round. Trout require water temperatures below 70 degrees and high oxygen levels, and usually will not survive through the summer in most ponds.

Except for supplemental stocking of channel catfish, a pond that already contains bass and bluegill generally does not need to be restocked. Additional bass or bluegill should only be stocked after evaluating their relative abundance and size distributions. See page 50 for ideas on how to assess fish populations.

Moving fish from a neighbor's pond, a local lake, or nearby stream to your pond is not a good idea. It can even be illegal, especially if you

do not follow bag, possession, and size limits. Many sunfish species are similar in appearance and you could accidentally stock green sunfish or other undesirable species. There is also the possibility of transmitting fish diseases to your pond. If you've invested a lot of money in building or renovating a fishing pond, trying to save a few bucks on stocking may sound attractive, but it is not likely to provide the return on your investment that you were hoping for. To reduce the risk of stocking undesirable fish species or diseased fish, obtain the initial stocking of largemouth bass and bluegills from the Commission, or purchase them and channel catfish from a licensed private fish hatchery.

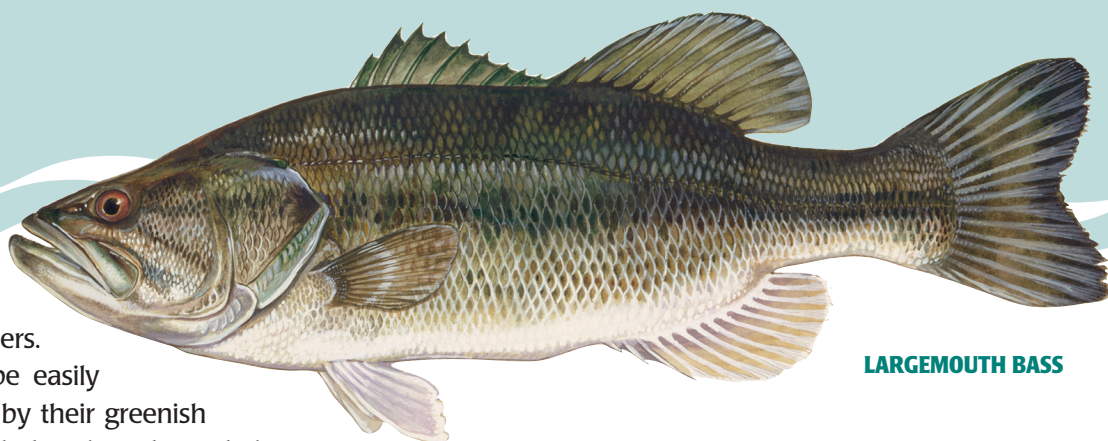
Ponds should be stocked as soon as possible following completion of the dam to reduce the chance of undesirable wild fish species becoming established. Water in a pond that is still filling should be at least 8 feet deep to ensure over-winter survival of fingerling fish initially stocked in the fall. It normally doesn't take long for food items, primarily zooplankton and aquatic insects, to become established. It is usually best to avoid stocking in summer months because high temperatures and low dissolved oxygen levels could be present in the water and reduce survival of stocked fish.

Recommended Stocking Combination

Largemouth Bass

Largemouth bass are large predators that are well adapted to ponds. They are members of the sunfish family. Because of their growth potential and fighting ability, bass are sought by

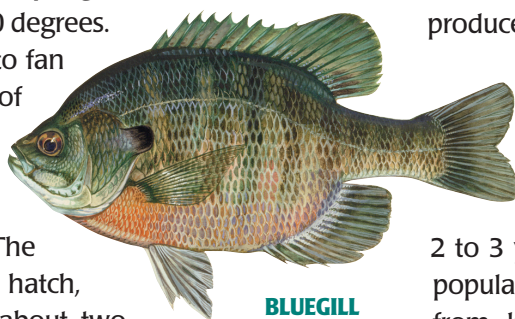




LARGEMOUTH BASS

many anglers. They can be easily recognized by their greenish color, the dark stripe along their sides, and white belly. They also have a large mouth with an upper jaw that extends beyond the eye when the mouth is closed. Largemouth bass are voracious eaters and consume a variety of foods. Small fish, aquatic insects, crayfish, salamanders, and frogs make up the bulk of their diet. They will also eat other animals, such as mice, snakes, and leeches. Bass will grow rapidly when food is plentiful, and any fish weighing more than five pounds is considered a trophy in Nebraska. The state record fish weighed 10 pounds, 11 ounces. Many near record-size bass are caught in farm ponds. In healthy ponds, bass may reach a length of 3 to 5 inches their first summer, and 10 to 13 inches after 3 years.

Bass reproduce readily in ponds after reaching a size of about 12 inches at 2 to 3 years of age. Spawning occurs during the spring when water temperatures reach 60 to 70 degrees. The male uses his body and fins to fan a large saucer-shaped nest free of debris on the bottom in shallow water. A female is then enticed over the nest where she deposits eggs that the male fertilizes. The male guards the eggs until they hatch, then he protects the young for about two weeks, at which time they are able to swim and find food on their own. If harvest is carefully regulated, bass will maintain a population without restocking. Adequate prey must be available for bass to attain their growth potential. If stocked alone, they usually over-populate and do not grow large.



BLUEGILL

Bluegill

Bluegills are a small, but hard-fighting sport fish. They provide angling opportunities for people of all ages and are excellent table fare. They are prolific spawners and well adapted to pond life, which makes them suitable for stocking in combination with largemouth bass. Bluegills are a deep-bodied sunfish with a relatively short head and small mouth. They range in color from silver-lavender, when young, to greenish-brown with an orange or yellow breast, when older. They also have a blue lower gill cover, entirely black gill cover flap, and an irregular blackish spot at the base of the soft dorsal fin. Although they primarily eat insects, larger bluegills will also consume snails, small crayfish, and an occasional small fish.

Six- to 8-inch or even trophy-size bluegill in excess of 10 inches (over 1 pound) can be produced if properly managed. The state record fish weighed 2 pounds, 13 ounces. Bluegills mature at a length of about 3 to 4 inches, which is at 2 to 3 years of age in established populations. Bluegills can spawn from late May through August. Fingerling bluegills initially stocked in the fall will spawn the next summer. Nesting begins in the spring when water temperatures reach 60 to 70 degrees. The male constructs a nest, a small saucer-shaped depression, on the bottom in shallow water. Eggs are deposited by the female and fertilized by the male, who then guards the



eggs and young for one to two weeks. Spawning beds, consisting of many nests in close proximity, provide excellent fishing during the spawning season. Bluegills rarely need to be restocked.

bluegill eat most of the eggs and young, periodic restocking will be necessary to maintain catfish populations in clear ponds. Restocked catfish should be at least 10 inches in length to ensure good survival.



CHANNEL CATFISH

Channel Catfish

Although channel catfish are native to streams and rivers, they do well in ponds and are favorites among many anglers. Channel catfish have a deeply forked tail, gray back, white belly, and eight barbels, commonly called whiskers, around their mouth. Young catfish have some black spots, which disappear as they mature. Large males develop a bluish color and are often misidentified as blue catfish. The anal fin of a blue catfish is straight along the bottom edge and has 30 or more rays; whereas, the anal fin of a channel catfish has a curved bottom edge and 24-29 rays. Catfish eat a wide variety of foods, including invertebrates, small fish, and aquatic plants. Fish eaten are usually dead or injured, and appear in the diet when catfish reach 12 to 14 inches. Channel catfish can be considered a bonus fish in the pond. Since they are not an important part of the predator-prey relationship, bass and bluegill will function just as well with or without them. But a pond's potential to produce fish is more fully realized if all three species are stocked. Channel catfish grow rapidly if sufficient food is available, and often attain a trophy size of 12 pounds or more. The state record fish weighed 41 pounds, 8 ounces.

Channel catfish spawn in early summer when water temperatures reach 75 to 80 degrees. The male makes a nest in a hole in the bank or in a hollow log, or next to any material that will provide protection for the young. The female deposits the eggs, which are then fertilized by the male. He then guards the eggs and young fish for about two weeks. Because bass and



10-inch channel catfish will have to be restocked periodically to maintain populations in clear ponds.

Other Potential Species

There are numerous other freshwater fish species that will live and grow in ponds. The following species can provide additional enjoyment or benefits; however, they can also create problems.



REDEAR SUNFISH

Redear Sunfish

Redear sunfish are native to the southeastern United States. They are sometimes stocked in place of, or in combination with, bluegills, because they can grow larger than bluegills, and have a low reproductive potential. Redears are a deep, slab-sided sunfish with a relatively small mouth. They are golden or light olive-green in color with a yellow or orange-yellow belly. The gill cover flap is black with a whitish border and, in adults, a prominent orange or red spot.

Redear sunfish spawning behavior is similar to that of bluegills. They typically have low population densities, especially north of their native range, where young-of-the-year are very sensitive to cold water temperature during the



winter. If stocking redears and depending on bass management goals, a mixed stocking rate of two-thirds bluegills and one-third redears is usually used to ensure bluegill become established and provide adequate food for the bass. Their availability is somewhat limited in the state and anglers may find them more wary and less aggressive than bluegill.

Redears feed primarily on snails, clams, and crayfish, and are commonly called “shellcrackers.” They can help to control snails, which are a required host in the life cycle of yellow and black grubs. Although these grubs often show up in the fillets of fish, they are not harmful to humans (see page 73). Redears require clear water with abundant vegetation for preferred food items to flourish and sufficient depths to avoid winterkills.

Crappie

There are two species of crappies: black and white. Both are silvery colored with black markings. Black crappies have seven or eight hard dorsal spines with black spots scattered randomly over their bodies. White crappies are usually slimmer and have five or six hard dorsal spines with black spots arranged in vertical bars

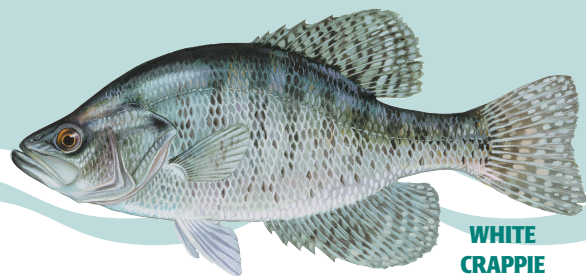


**BLACK
CRAPPIE**

on their sides. Spawning male white crappies become very dark and boldly marked, and are often mistaken for black crappies. Spawning behavior is similar to that of largemouth bass and bluegills. White crappies usually predominate in somewhat turbid waters, while black crappies



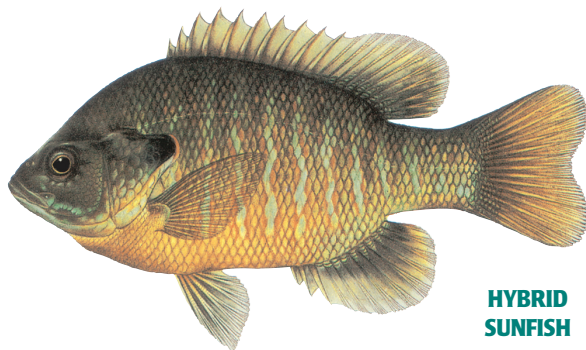
Crappies tend to overpopulate and grow slowly if predators do not reduce the number of young, especially when turbid water prevents their detection.



**WHITE
CRAPPIE**

do better in clear water. Although crappies are very popular with anglers, they can become a problem in ponds. Since crappies feed primarily on small fish and invertebrates, they compete with bass for food.

In clear water with large numbers of bass present, black crappies can grow rapidly to lengths of 10 to 12 inches and provide quality fishing. A good rule of thumb is to avoid stocking black crappie unless your pond produces bluegills over 8 inches long. This is a good indication that the largemouth bass population is dense enough to control crappies as well.



**HYBRID
SUNFISH**

Hybrid Sunfish

Hybrid sunfish are a cross between two sunfish species, generally green sunfish and bluegill. They produce offspring that typically do not overpopulate, grow larger than either parental species, and are easier to catch due to their aggressive feeding habits; however, the growth difference is usually slight without artificial feeding. Because hybrids do not produce enough offspring to support desirable largemouth bass populations, they should be stocked in combination with bluegills. Hybrids do not breed true, spawning produces second generation offspring that can be undesirable and exhibit a wide range of characteristics. Hybrids will have



to be periodically restocked, utilizing larger fish, in order to maintain a population when bass are present. For these reasons, hybrid sunfish are rarely recommended for stocking.

**BLACK
BULLHEAD**



Black Bullhead

Black bullheads are a member of the catfish family. They are common in many small streams and often find their way into ponds. They are usually gray or black on top, with a yellow or white belly. The tail fin is almost square. Their bottom-feeding activities stir up sediment and can cause a pond to become muddy. This hinders sight-feeding fish such as largemouth bass and bluegills and reduces pond productivity. Bullheads become over-populated if stocked alone or a pond is muddy, or when very few bass are present. After hatching, young bullheads travel in compact schools called pods, often escorted by adults. In clear ponds with good bass populations, few bullheads survive. The ones that do, grow to a large size and are fun to catch and good to eat. As with black crappies, black bullheads should only be stocked in ponds that are producing bluegills longer than 8 inches.



Bullheads are rarely recommended for stocking.

FLATHEAD CATFISH



Northern Pike, Walleye, Flathead Catfish, Rainbow Trout, Wiper (Striped x White Bass Hybrid), Yellow Perch, and Smallmouth Bass

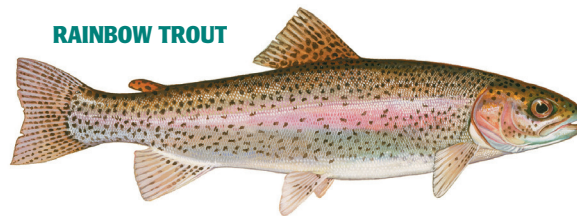
Although these fish are desired by some ponds owners and normally do not cause problems, they generally are not well suited for pond environments. Extra management efforts



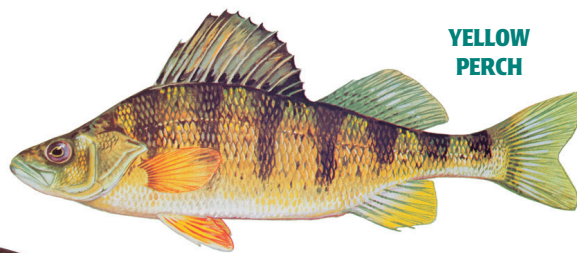
WALLEYE

will be required to maintain populations of these species, if they survive at all. These species typically do not reproduce adequately in ponds to maintain populations, are costly to stock, can be difficult to obtain, and most ponds cannot support many of them.

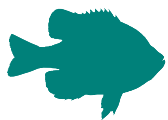
RAINBOW TROUT

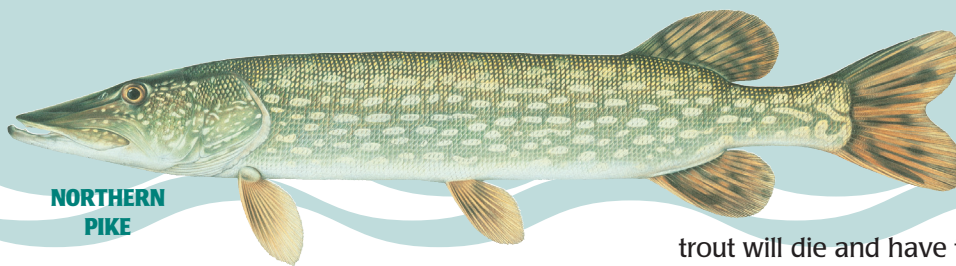


Very few ponds, particularly in eastern Nebraska, offer enough cool, clear water and/or aquatic vegetation to support walleyes, northern pike, yellow perch, smallmouth bass, and striped x white bass hybrid, also known as



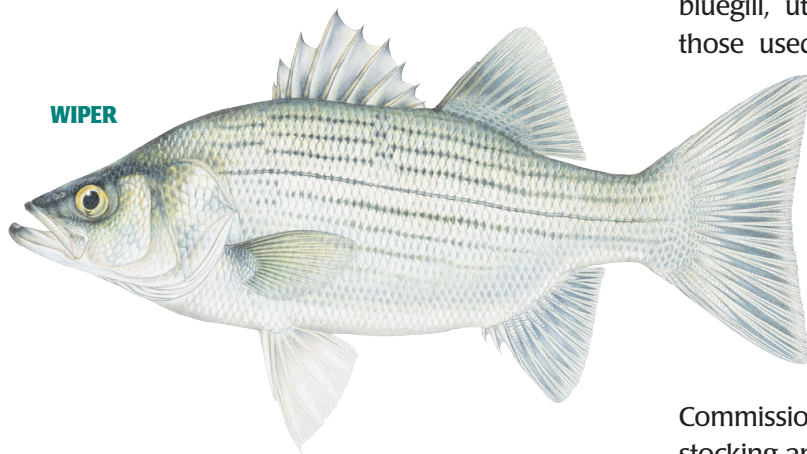
**YELLOW
PERCH**





**NORTHERN
PIKE**

wipers. Most ponds warm considerably during the summer, which can hinder the growth of these species and reduce survival of older fish. Although walleyes and northerns can survive in larger ponds or lakes in eastern Nebraska, they will likely have to be restocked periodically to maintain populations. While flathead catfish can



WIPER

be stocked to produce a trophy fishery or as an additional predator, they will not effectively control bluegills as well as a properly managed largemouth bass population. Wipers generally require supplemental feeding in order to attain their full growth potential. See page 36 for additional wiper information.



**SMALLMOUTH
BASS**

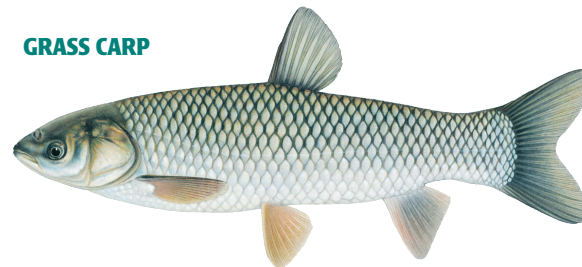
Very few ponds are capable of supporting trout year-round. Trout require water temperatures below 70 degrees and a high oxygen content. If trout are desired in eastern ponds, they can be stocked to provide a seasonal fishery from fall

through late spring. Unless a spring or aerated well water provides enough cool water for the pond during the summer,

trout will die and have to be restocked each fall. See page 35 for more trout stocking information.

For ponds and lakes in western Nebraska that have adequate depth and moderate levels of submerged vegetation, yellow perch can be considered as an additional prey fish. If yellow perch are being considered for western waters, they should be stocked in combination with bluegill, utilizing stocking strategies similar to those used for redear sunfish. Some western and northern waters may be able to support smallmouth bass, provided the ponds contain clear, deep water, submerged vegetation, rocky substrate, and crayfish. Since they cannot compete effectively with largemouth bass, they should not be stocked if largemouth bass are already present. Consult a local

Commission fisheries biologist for advice before stocking any of these species.



GRASS CARP

Grass Carp

Grass carp are native to Asia and were brought to this country as a means to control aquatic vegetation. They are members of the minnow family. They usually grow larger than the common carp, often attaining weights in excess of 50 pounds, and can live for decades.

The Commission does not recommend stocking grass carp; alternative vegetation control techniques should be used instead. The best solution for a vegetation problem is to



create more deep water to hinder the growth of submergent vegetation. If a pond owner insists, grass carp should only be stocked in ponds which have severe submerged vegetation problems that are negatively affecting fish populations. They will have no appreciable effect on algae species commonly referred to as moss or pond scum. Grass carp should only be stocked at a density of no more than 5 fish per vegetated acre to control plants or 15 per vegetated acre to eliminate them. Stocked fish should be at least 10 inches long to ensure high survival. Successful grass carp reproduction has not been documented in a pond or lake.



See page 63 for additional vegetation control information and page 65 for more about grass carp.

Species to Avoid

The following species should not be stocked in ponds. If undesirable fish are already established, they may have to be eliminated before the pond is stocked with the recommended stocking combination.



See page 55 for details on removing or controlling unwanted fish species.

Gizzard Shad

Gizzard shad are silvery colored with a dark spot near the head and a sharp, saw-like ridge on their bellies. Although shad can be the primary food source for large game fish in large reservoirs, they are not recommended for



GIZZARD SHAD



ponds. Shad spawn from spring into summer by scattering eggs randomly in shallow water. This produces very high numbers of young shad that feed on the same invertebrates as bluegills and small bass, negatively impacting survival, growth, and body condition of young-of-the-year bass and bluegill of all ages. An overabundant population of shad can also consume most of the zooplankton, which are capable of controlling nuisance algae species. This can lead to extensive algae blooms. Adult shad normally grow too large for most bass to eat.

FATHEAD MINNOW



Fathead Minnow

Fathead minnows are dull, silvery-colored baitfish that grow to about 3 inches in length. Fatheads feed on small invertebrates and plant material. They are hardy and very prolific. Eggs are deposited on the underside of submerged tree branches, aquatic vegetation, or boards placed in the water for that purpose. Since they spawn several times throughout the summer, they can produce very large numbers of young. An overabundant population of fatheads can remove most of the zooplankton and lead to extensive algae blooms.

Fatheads should not be stocked in ponds to accelerate initial bass growth. Extremely high populations of minnows have been found to directly compete with stocked fingerling largemouth bass and bluegills, resulting in poor survival of their offspring. Although the young bass that survive to eat the minnows grow well, they will be low in number. The bluegill population may not be able to expand until the fatheads are eliminated by disease and/or predators. Although fatheads are excellent prey for smaller bass, bluegills are a better suited prey for adult bass. Fathead minnows can be used in channel catfish-only ponds, see page 36 for details.



**GOLDEN
SHINER**

Golden Shiner

Named for their gold color, golden shiners have a small upturned mouth and an obvious downward curving lateral line – a series of sensory tubes and pores extending back from the head along both sides of the body. Golden shiners should not be stocked to accelerate initial bass growth rates because they will compete directly with bluegills and small bass for food.

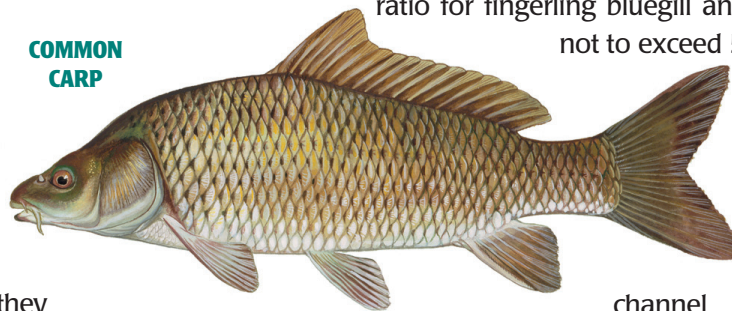


**GREEN
SUNFISH**

Green Sunfish

Green sunfish are often confused with bluegills and then mistakenly stocked into ponds. They have a stocky, tubular body shape, and their medium-sized mouths are considerably larger than a bluegill's. They are greenish in color and have a black gill cover flap with a whitish or yellowish margin. Green sunfish flourish in ponds that have not yet been stocked with desirable fish. If they get large enough, or have already spawned, they can be a serious threat to the survival of bass, bluegill, and channel catfish when they are initially stocked. They normally do not pose a serious problem if they enter a pond containing a well-established bass population.

**COMMON
CARP**



Common Carp

Carp are members of the minnow family and can grow to be quite large. Like bullheads, they are bottom feeders and tend to stir up sediment and cause a pond to become muddy. They tend to overpopulate and grow slowly. A well-established bass population can control carp in ponds if good water clarity can be maintained.

Stocking Recommendations

Warmwater Ponds

The best approach for establishing large-mouth bass, bluegill, and channel catfish populations in a new pond is to use YOY (young-of-the-year) fingerlings and stock 1- to 2-inch bluegills the first year and 2- to 3-inch bass the second year. Channel catfish fingerlings, ranging from 2 to 4 inches, can be stocked the same year as the bass. Bluegills should be stocked in late summer or early fall. This will allow them time to grow and spawn the following summer, with offspring providing prey for bass stocked the second year. Keep in mind a pond that is still filling should be at least 8 feet deep to ensure overwinter survival of stocked fish.

To determine the proper number of fish to stock, the surface area of the pond must first be determined. The recommended initial stocking ratio for fingerling bluegill and bass is 5 to 1,

not to exceed 500 bluegills and

100 bass per surface acre of water. The initial stocking density for fingerling

channel catfish is 100

per acre. This combination will begin to provide angling opportunities in about two years. If too few bluegills are stocked initially, an unusually high number of their first spawn will survive due to little competition for available



Warmwater Pond Stocking Recommendations (Fingerlings)

Species	Number Per Acre	Length (Inches)	When to Stock
Bluegill	500	1-2	Fall
Channel Catfish	100	2-4	Following Late Spring
Largemouth Bass	100	2-3	Following Late Spring
Largemouth Bass	50	3-4	One Year Later*

*Optional

Expected Lengths (Inches) of Fish Initially Stocked in a Typical Nebraska Farm Pond*

Species	Stocking Length (Inches)	Years After Stocking			
		1	2	3	4
Bluegill	1-2	4.5	6	7	7.5
Channel Catfish	2-4	10	14	16	17
Largemouth Bass	2-3	9	11	13	15

* Growth of subsequent year classes will likely be slower.

space and food. This can become a problem if bass are over-harvested, or are unable to effectively prey upon the bluegills due to poor water clarity or too much cover. Stocking at higher than recommended densities usually results in slow growth and poor fish populations.



If the surface area of a pond is unknown, consult NRCS or the pond contractor, or estimate it by using formulas in Appendix C.

When a pond is properly managed, bass and bluegill only need to be stocked once. Although not necessary, a second stocking of 50 largemouth bass fingerlings per surface acre can be considered in the third year. Since bass from the initial stocking usually would not spawn until the fourth year, this second stocking would provide the year-class of bass that would otherwise be missing in the pond. In order to maintain a population, 10-inch channel catfish should be restocked every 2 to 3 years; number stocked should equal the harvest

Warmwater Pond Stocking Recommendations (Adults)

Species	Number Per Acre	Length (Inches)	When to Stock
Bluegill	150-250	4-5	Spring
Channel Catfish	20-50	6-10	Spring or Fall
Largemouth Bass	30-50	8-12	Spring



plus an additional 10 percent to compensate for natural mortality.

If the pond is large, the cost of fish may be prohibitive at the densities recommended above. A pond larger than 5 acres can be stocked as if it was only 5 acres. This will save some money and still provide enough fish to establish populations. Keep in mind the likelihood of high survival of the bluegills' first spawn that could cause a problem if the bass don't become established or if bass are over-harvested. If cost is not an issue, you should stock more fish, just be sure to maintain the recommended ratios and do not exceed the maximum of 500 bluegill and 100 bass per acre.

Although more costly, another option is to stock adult fish. This option will provide angling opportunities sooner. While these fish are more expensive due to their larger size, their survival chances are higher, so fewer are needed to get a population established. Stocking adults will be necessary if the pond already has fish that are capable of consuming or out-competing fingerling bass and bluegill. Under this option, all three fish species are stocked the first year – the bass and bluegill during the spring and channel catfish either in the spring or fall. Catfish should be restocked every 2 or 3 years to maintain their numbers, depending on the amount of angler harvest. Stocked catfish should be at least 6 inches long the first year and 10 inches long in later years to reduce their chance of being eaten by largemouth bass.

Simply stocking a few adult fish to populate a new pond is risky and not advised. Production

of young fish from these adults in the first year is unpredictable. Bluegills may spawn more successfully than bass and the pond can immediately become out of balance (see page 48). Fishing quality will become poor quickly, and will likely stay that way. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a high-density bass population the first several years following initial stockings.

For sand pits, quarries, and other steep-sided waters, the stocking recommendations are the same. Pits with very little water less than 4 feet deep may need supplemental stockings due to limited reproduction by bluegills and largemouth bass. New sand pits are usually infertile and will not be able to produce as many fish as a new farm pond.

Coldwater Ponds

For ponds able to support trout year-round, the suggested stocking rates are 100 adults, 8 inches or longer, per acre or 150 to 200 fingerlings, up to 5 inches in length, per acre. Smaller fish are cheaper and easier to transport. In ponds where large predators are established, only adult trout should be stocked to reduce the likelihood that the stocked fish will be eaten. Trout ponds will need to be restocked every 2 to 3 years, depending upon the amount of angler harvest. Ponds that only support trout on a seasonal basis can be stocked using 8-inch or larger trout at 100 per acre in the fall, when water temperatures stay below 70 degrees. Trout can be fed with commercial trout food, if desired.

Trout Stocking Recommendations

Species	Number Per Acre	Length (Inches)	When to Stock
Rainbow Trout	100	8 or Larger	When Water Temperature Is Below 70 Degrees
Rainbow Trout	150-200	5 or Smaller	When Water Temperature Is Below 70 Degrees



Small Fishing Ponds

Channel catfish are recommended for smaller ponds with adequate depth, particularly those less than one-half acre in size where it would be difficult to maintain balanced populations of bass and bluegills if angler harvest is high. Stocking only catfish is also recommended in muddy ponds since dirty water (clarity less than 12 inches) would hinder sight-feeding fish like bass and bluegill. Catfish can be stocked at an initial rate of 200 to 300 fish per acre with 4- to 6-inch fingerlings or 100 fish per acre with 8- to 12-inch sub-adults. Catfish can then be artificially fed to maximize growth and harvest. If the pond is already muddy and no feeding program will be used, the initial stocking densities should be cut in half.

If no reproduction occurs, catfish will have to be periodically stocked to compensate for harvest. They should be maintained at a density up to 100 fish per acre, 200 or more if supplemental feeding is provided, depending on the size of catfish present. Maintain a record of catfish harvest. Restock 8- to 10-inch catfish during the spring or fall when cooler water temperatures are less stressful. Again, the number stocked should equal the harvest plus an additional 10 percent to compensate for natural mortality. Fathead minnows can be stocked with catfish to provide additional food and a source of bait.



Ponds containing only catfish should not contain any structure that would facilitate spawning; otherwise, an overpopulation of small slow-growing catfish is likely and would worsen turbidity, due to their bottom feeding nature.

Another option for smaller ponds would be wipers, (striped bass x white bass hybrid), provided a feeding program will be used. Wipers can be initially stocked as 2- to 4-inch fingerlings at 100 per surface acre of water. Depending on the amount of harvest and natural mortality, supplemental stockings of 20 to 30 6- to 8-inch

fish per acre will be needed every 2 to 3 years. Wipers, particularly those weighing more than 5 pounds, may not survive when water temperatures remain warmer than 85 degrees for extended periods, or when dissolved oxygen levels drop below 4 parts per million. Feeding should be discontinued until these conditions improve. Wipers larger than 5 pounds can be produced, provided adequate deep water and moderate levels of submerged vegetation are available, and high dissolved oxygen levels can be maintained. Aeration may be necessary to maintain oxygen levels. Wipers can also co-exist in ponds with largemouth bass and bluegills.

Sources of Fish for Stocking

The Commission will provide largemouth bass, bluegill, and possibly trout, for stocking new, privately-owned ponds or those where the Commission has recently authorized the existing fish population to be chemically removed. To be eligible for fish, private ponds must be one-half surface acre or larger in size. One-fourth of the pond must be at least 10 feet deep. There may be exceptions for spring fed ponds, natural lakes, and others at the discretion of the inspecting biologist. No other fish should be present at the time of stocking, with the exception of recently stocked channel catfish. Ponds must have a minimum water clarity of 12 inches. Fencing to exclude livestock will be required under most circumstances.

Although owners of state-stocked waters are not obligated to allow unlimited public fishing access, they cannot charge anglers a fee to fish and are urged to grant access to anglers who ask permission to fish. A valid Nebraska fishing permit is required of every person 16 years of age and older who fishes these ponds, and all anglers must comply with current state fishing regulations.

All applications for fish must be returned by August 1 to be considered for stocking during that calendar year. If a pond has multiple landowners, all landowners must concur with



the stocking request or the application will be denied. If a shortage of fish should occur, the owner will be notified and placed on a waiting list for the following year.

Young-of-the-year bluegills will be available during the fall and largemouth bass during the following late spring. Coldwater ponds capable of supporting trout throughout the year can be considered for an initial fall trout stocking. Owners who allow reasonable public access may also receive supplemental fingerling trout stockings.

Fish can be purchased from a licensed private aquaculturist or licensed nonresident fish dealer. Ponds that are stocked with purchased fish may be exempt from fishing license requirements and harvest restrictions. Consult Nebraska's fishing regulations or contact a local conservation officer for details. A list of licensed commercial fish dealers is available from the Commission. It is advisable to consult several suppliers to see who has the best prices and the most convenient delivery schedules.

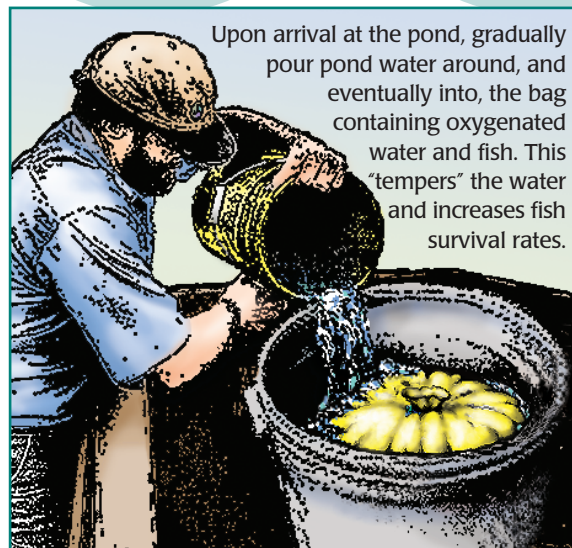


Look for a copy of the fish application in the back of this handbook.

Stocking Process

If you are transporting fish to your pond, do not fill your container with tap water, especially if it contains chlorine or chloramines. Both can kill fish. It is best to take fresh water from your pond just before you pick up the fish. Water taken the day before may cool off significantly during the night. Water allowed to sit during the day may become too warm. Either situation can kill fish when they are transferred directly into the container. When fish are obtained from the Commission, your hauling container should have a trash bag liner and be half-filled with pond water. Upon arrival at the pick-up site, the water in your container is tempered to closely match the temperature of the water in the fish hauling tank. Fish are then added and the water oxygenated. Finally, the bag is sealed and the container is ready for the trip to the pond. A

commercial supplier will often fill your container with oxygenated water when you get your fish, or he may provide fish already packaged in Styrofoam containers and/or plastic bags with water.



Get the fish to the pond as quickly as possible to ensure their survival. Transportation delays can cause oxygen levels in the water to drop and water temperature to rise, resulting in stressed or even dead fish. If the water for transporting your fish wasn't taken from your pond, the water's pH, hardness, alkalinity and temperature will likely be different from that in your pond. Do not pour the fish into the pond right away. Fish must be acclimated to the changes in water chemistry first, or they can go into shock and die. This is especially important if the water temperature in your container is more than 5 degrees different from the water in your pond. Over the course of 15 to 30 minutes, mix pond water into the water in the container with the fish. Then place the container into the pond so that the fish can swim out when they are ready. Or, the hauling container can be partially submerged into the pond, allowing water to be slowly exchanged until the chemistry is similar to that of the pond. Be careful while handling the fish; any wound created may become infected with bacteria or fungi. Although the fish may swim away into the pond, they may die later from these infections.

